

VISIT...

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CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER

Jan Strnad
Steve Buccellato
Stan Drake

R. J. M. Lofficier
John Ridgway

Peter Atkins
Dave Dorman
Lurene Haines





foreword
D. G. Chichester

The Crystal Precipice

Jan Strnad

writer

Steve Buccellato

pencil

Stan Drake

ink

Sherilyn Van Valkenburgh

color

Michael Heisler

letter

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The Blood of a Poet

R. J. M. Lofficier

writer

John Ridgway

art

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color

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Songs of Metal & Flesh

Peter Atkins

writer

Dave Dorman & Lurene Haines

artist

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FOREWORD

Every Saturday night, 8 o'clock, Channel 11. It waited—**Chiller Theater**. Offering the best in horror movies an independent station could (which isn't saying much). **Chiller** was memorable for two reasons: 1) the six fingered hand that would come out of a bubbling swamp in the show's opening, gobbling its logo letter-by-letter as a voice intoned "Chiiiiiller," and 2) the fact that every three months **Chiller's** limited suspense cinema would return it (and me) once more to **The Crawling Eye**.

It made my blood run cold, this never-seen-orb, hiding within a mysterious fog atop a mountain, barely leaving its victims time to scream "EEAAAARGGG!" before it took their heads as its foul prize. Heads continued to roll (or not) until intrepid Forrest Tucker (yes, like in **F-Troop**) led a daring expedition (well, to an 8 year old) up the mountain, riding a rickety cable car into that dreaded fog—at which time the inevitable call of "BEDTIME!" would ring out, leaving me to once more wonder fearfully as to the true face (?) of that optic beast.

Well, Channel 11 got respectable and promptly hacked off its six-fingered hand, stranding me with a never-to-be-faced terror in the back of my mind—until that late afternoon my brother Keith and I confronted the horrid jellied sphere for the final time. We watched past the cable car riding up into that fog, waiting for the moment when the Eye, that thing of things, was finally revealed—to most closely resemble a golf ball stuck on a mound of soggy spaghetti. Not that there isn't a certain horror in that, but something had been lost over the years: what would have sent me screaming to a sanitarium as a child now sent me reaching for the remote. And that, gentle reader, is all a rather obtuse way of observing that part of life is about overcoming certain fears—but, fortunately, when we have moved past one terror, there are always new acts of darkness waiting in the wings to perform their danse macabres for us.

Which brings us to this issue's talented cast: "The Crystal Precipice" presents an outer space encore of the Cenobite Face, staged by **Stalkers** co-writer Jan Strnad, penciler Steve Buccellato and longtime inking talent Stan Drake. In between their work on the Moebius graphic novels and scripting the upcoming fantasy-adventure **The Elsewhere Prince**, writers RJM Lofficier stir up "The Blood of the Poet," an eerie tale of Paris in the early 1900's; John Ridgway, hard at work on a science-fiction opus at DC Comics, provides the evocative illustrations. And for our final act, **Hellbound: Hellraiser II** screenwriter Peter Atkins and artist Dave Dorman strike the chords that play the "Songs of Metal and Flesh."

Together with editor Margaret Clark, they promise to take you on a fear-filled rickety cable car ride of your very own. And as you head up that dark mountain and the fog closes around you, a word of advice: Keep your eyes—

EEAAAARGGG!

Daniel Chichester
consulting editor



• SCAPPO •

THE CRYSTAL PRECIPICE

"WHAT IS IT, BARRY?
A CITY?"

"I CAN'T TELL. IT'S
STRANGE--"

"FOR CHRIS'S SAKE,
IF THAT'S THE BEST
YOU CAN DO, GIVE
ME THE BINOCULARS!"

"SHUT UP, ERNEST.
LET HIM LOOK."

"OKAY THEN,
GIVE ME SOMETHING
ELSE TO LOOK AT.
YOU'D THINK, AFTER
ALL THESE MONTHS--"

"AFTER ALL THESE
MONTHS, YOU'RE STILL
THE LAST PERSON I'D
WANT TO GET PERSON-
AL WITH. YOU'VE HEARD
THE PHRASE--
"FAMILIARITY BREEDS
CONTEMPT"?"

"WAIT A MINUTE!
I SEE--I THINK IT'S
A MAN!"

"I THINK IT'S HUMAN. I
CAN JUST BARELY MAKE OUT
THE FORM, AND I CAN'T
REALLY SEE ITS--"

"ANOTHER
HUMAN BEING?
IT'S TOO GOOD
TO BE TRUE!"

"IT'S SO FAR
OFF, IT'S HARD
TO TELL FOR
SURE."

MAG

"--FACE."

JAN
STRAND
STORY

STEVE
BUCCELLATO
PENCILS

STAN
DRAKE
INKS

SHERILYN
VANVALKENBURGH
COLORING

MICHAEL
HEISLER
LETTERS



LOOK! IT'S THOSE LIGHTS AGAIN, LIKE WE SAW FROM THE AIR! THEY'RE COMING THIS WAY!

WHAT ARE THEY, BARRY? MAYBE WE SHOULD GO BACK INSIDE--

I SAY WE BRING 'EM DOWN BEFORE THEY GET ANY CLOSER! WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY ARE? SOME KIND OF MISSILES, MAYBE!

DON'T BE AN IDIOT, ERNEST. IF THEY ARE INTELLIGENTLY GUIDED, WE HAVE TO SHOW OUR PEACEFUL INTENTIONS-- UNLESS THEY STRIKE FIRST.



THEY LOOK CRYSTALLINE, LIKE THE CITY. COULD THEY BE INTELLIGENT?

WELL, THEY'RE MORE THAN JUST SOME CHANCE, AERIAL PHENOMENON, I KNOW THAT. THEY MOVE SLOWLY, BUT THEY MADE A BEELINE STRAIGHT FOR US.

LOOK HOW THEY FLOAT THERE, LIKE THEY'RE WATCHING US.

"WATCH" IS NOT THE WORD, BUT IT IS THE CONCEPT.



MY PERFECT, CRYSTALLINE FRIENDS DO NOT "LOOK," BUT THEY CAN SEE. THEY DO NOT "THINK," BUT THEY ARE FILLED WITH WONDER. THEY DO NOT "TALK," BUT THE DISCOURSE BETWEEN THEM IS BEAUTIFUL AND HARMONIOUS.

IT'S TOO LATE TO START FOR THE CITY TODAY. FIRST THING TOMORROW MORNING.



THE FLESHY INVADERS DO NOT APPRECIATE MY FRIENDS AS I DO. THEY ARE DISCORDANT NOTES IN THE MUSIC OF THIS WORLD. THEY ARE ANGRY DISSONANCES.

I SAY WE GO NOW. BEFORE THAT GUY BUGS OUT.

IT IS FOR THEM THE PRECIPICE WAS CONSTRUCTED. IT IS THIS WORLD'S PUZZLE. ONE OF THEM WILL SOLVE IT, AND HE WILL BRING THE WILL OF LEVIATHAN TO BEAR ON THE OTHERS.

THE FLESH IS NOT WANTED HERE. IT IS NOT WANTED ON THIS PERFECT, ORDERED WORLD. THIS SPEN OF ROCK AND DUST AND CRYSTAL.

HE'LL STILL BE THERE TOMORROW. I DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT OUTSIDE THE SHIP AFTER DARK.

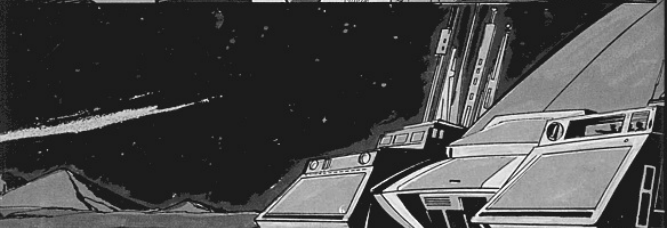


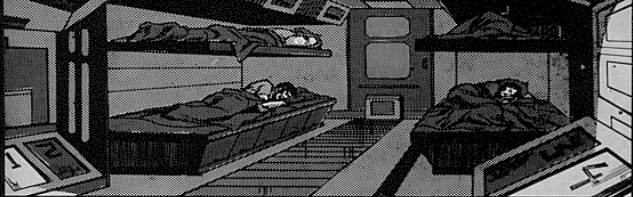
MY FRIENDS WILL NOT KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THE EVENTS TO FOLLOW. THEY ARE TOO PERFECT TO COMPREHEND THE UGLINESS OF THE FLESH--



YOU'RE THE BOSS, BUT IF HE'S GONE WHEN WE GET THERE, DON'T BLAME ME.

--OR ITS WEAKNESSES, OR ITS EVIL.







WHANG!
WHANG!

CRUNCH!
WHAP!

WH-WHATS
GOING ON?
WHAT IS IT?



BARRY! STOP IT! WHAT
ARE YOU DOING?

I'M TEACHING
THIS WEASEL A
LESSON, THAT'S WHAT!
TEACHING HIM TO STAY
IN HIS OWN GODDAMN
BLINK AT NIGHT!



ANDREA, YOU POOR
DEAR! DID HE--?

IT WASN'T THE FIRST
TIME, I...I WAS AFRAID
TO SAY ANYTHING--



TOSS HIM OUTSIDE. IF
HE SHOWS HIS FACE AGAIN,
I SWEAR TO GOD I'LL
BLOW IT TO DUST.

ANDREA? IT'S
YOUR CALL. WHAT
DO YOU SAY WE
DO WITH HIM?



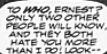
FEED HIM.
FEED HIM.
FEED HIM.
HIS BALLS.



YOU...YOU AREN'T
GOING TO DO...LIKE
SHE SAID!

I COULD LIVE
WITH THAT.

YOU'LL
ANSWER
FOR IT!



TO WHO, ERNEST?
ONLY TWO OTHER
PEOPLE WILL KNOW,
AND THEY BOTH
HATE YOU MORE
THAN I DO! LOOK--

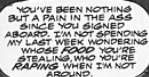


WE'RE STUCK HERE,
THE SHIP'S GROUND.
WE'VE GOT FOOD FOR
A WEEK, MAYBE. THIS
PLANET'S LIFELESS
--TOTALLY! NOT SO
MUCH AS A GERM IN
ANY OF THE SAMPLES
WE TOOK!

WHAT ARE YOU GONNA
DO? YOU GONNA SHOOT
ME OR WHAT?



--MY IMPULSE IS
TO SEE YOU RUN, AS
FAST AS YOUR LEGS
CAN CARRY YOU.



YOU'VE BEEN NOTHING
BUT A PAIN IN THE ASS
SINCE YOU SIGNED
ABOARD. I'M NOT SPENDING
MY LAST WEEK WONDERING
WHOSE FOOD YOU'RE
STEALING, WHO YOU'RE
RAPING WHEN I'M NOT
AROUND.



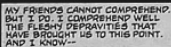
I COULD,
MAYBE I WILL.
BUT RIGHT
NOW--



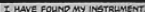
RUN, ERNEST! GET
OUT OF PISTOL RANGE
BEFORE I CHANGE MY
MIND! AND REMEMBER
--I'M A DAMN GOOD
SHOT!



RUN, DAMN IT!
RUN!



MY FRIENDS CANNOT COMPREHEND.
BUT I DO. I COMPREHEND WELL
THE FLESHY DEPRAVITIES THAT
HAVE BROUGHT US TO THIS POINT.
AND I KNOW--



I HAVE FOUND MY INSTRUMENT.





WHAT NOW,
FACE? WHAT
DO I DO WITH
HER?

WHATEVER
YOU LIKE.



YOU BRAVED THE
PRECIPICE, YOU PAID THE
PRICE-- ONLY AN OUNCE OF
FLESH-- AND NOW MY BOUNTY
IS YOURS. DO WHAT YOU
WILL WITH HER. INDULGE
YOUR IMAGINATION.



MMPH, NIFF--

ANDREA!
WHERE ARE YOU?
ARE YOU ALL
RIGHT? ANDREA!



PITY. NOW WE'LL
HAVE TO KILL HER
QUICKLY, BEFORE
SHE ATTRACTS THE
ATTENTION OF THE
OTHERS.



HERE. I'LL DO IT.



ANDREA, DAMN
IT! SAY SOMETHING!
ANDREA!



OH, CHRIST--

ERNEST, DAMN YOU
TO HELL! DAMN YOU! YOU'LL
PAY FOR THIS, YOU BASTARD!
I PROMISE IT!



LET ME KILL HIM, FACE!
GIVE ME THE STRENGTH, AND
I KNOW I CAN TAKE HIM!

IN GOOD TIME,
MY FRIEND.



"EVERYTHING IN ITS TIME."



WHAT WILL HAPPEN
TO HER BODY? I MEAN,
WILL IT DECOMPOSE HERE?
THERE'S NO LIFE TO BREAK
IT DOWN, TO MAKE SOME-
THING NEW OUT OF...
OUT OF--





IT'S ALL JUST A BIG WASTE, ISN'T IT? THERE ISN'T EVEN ANY KIND OF CYCLE TO MAKE IT ALL MAKE SENSE!

WE DON'T KNOW THAT, MAYBE WHEN WE GET TO THE CITY--



THE CITY! WE DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT IT IS A CITY!

AND WHAT ARE THOSE DAMN THINGS? ALWAYS THERE HANGING ON EVERY MOVE WE MAKE!



GO AWAY! LEAVE US ALONE! LET US DIE IN PEACE, DAMN IT!

FELICE, STOP IT! PUT THE GUN AWAY!



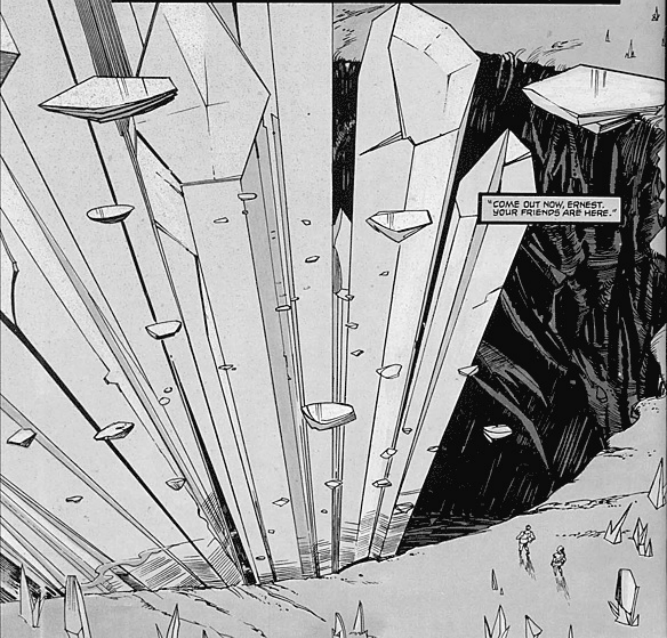
FELICE! COME BACK! WE HAVE TO STAY TOGETHER!



ERNEST HAS AGREED TO MAKE AN ADDITIONAL PAYMENT. HE WANTS TO HANDLE THIS ONE ON HIS OWN. I THINK I'LL LET HIM.



IT'S TIME TO LET THEM REACH THE PRECIPICE.





WELL, THAT'S THAT.
WE'RE NOT GETTING OVER
TO THE SPIRES, AND FROM
THE LOOKS OF THEM,
THERE ISN'T ANY REASON
WHY WE SHOULD
WANT TO.

I'M LOOKING AT
ONE VERY GOOD
REASON.



ERNEST, AND HE'S
GUZZLING WATER LIKE
HE'S GOT A SWIMMING
POOL OF THE STUFF.

I SEE HIM!
OH, NOW HE'S
WAVING!

MAG

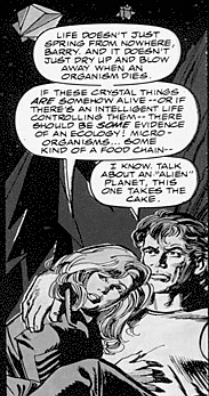


WE'RE LOSING THE
LIGHT. IT'D BE CRAZY
TO START ACROSS
THIS LATE IN THE
DAY.

TOMORROW,
WE GO AFTER THE
SONUVABITCH.

"IT'S A TRICK. HE JUST
WANTS US TO KILL
OURSELVES TRYING
TO REACH HIM."

"HE MADE IT.
WE CAN TOO."



LIFE DOESN'T JUST
SPRING FROM NOWHERE,
BARRY, AND IT DOESN'T
JUST DRY UP AND BLOW
AWAY WHEN AN
ORGANISM DIES.

IF THESE CRYSTAL THINGS
ARE SOMEHOW ALIVE--OR IF
THERE'S AN INTELLIGENT LIFE
CONTROLLING THEM--THERE
SHOULD BE SOME EVIDENCE
OF AN ECOLOGY! MICRO-
ORGANISMS... SOME
KIND OF A FOOD CHAIN--

I KNOW. TALK
ABOUT AN "ALIEN"
PLANET, THIS
ONE TAKES THE
CAKE.



I HAVE TO
TAKE A LEAK.
WHAT HAPPENED
TO "MODESTY BE
DAMNED"?

OLD INHIBITIONS
DIE HARD. DON'T WORRY,
I'LL BE RIGHT HERE.



YEAH, WELL, BE
QUICK ABOUT IT. THAT'S
WHEN HE GOT ANDREA,
YOU KNOW.



JEEZ--YOU DID
HAVE A BLADDER
FULL, YOU GOING
TO STAND THERE
ALL NIGHT?



PIDDAAH PIDDAAH PADDAAH PADDAAH PIDDAAH PIDDAAH



THE WOMAN'S MOUTH OPENS
WIDE, HER JAW TREMBLES, BUT
NO SOUND COMES FORTH.

PADDAAH PADDAAH PIDDAAH PIDDAA



I GOT YOU,
BABE, AND
BABY, BABY,
BABY--



LIKE HELL--

NICELY DONE, GIRL. A
LITTLE RAGGED, BUT A
DECENT IMPROVISATION.



WELL? ARE YOU GOING TO
JUST SIT
THERE? ARE YOU
GOING AFTER HER?

SHE
RIPPED MY
FACE! IT
HURTS,
FACE!

YES, EXQUISITE.
ISN'T IT? BUT YOU CAN'T
LET THAT DIVERT YOU
FROM YOUR MISSION.



DAMN IT, I'M
THROUGH FOOLING
AROUND. DOING
EVERYTHING YOUR
WAY! I'M TAKING
THE BITCH OUT!

ERNEST, PLEASE
TRY TO RISE ABOVE
YOUR CHARACTER.
TRY TO SHOW SOME
STYLE--

SHUT UP,
FACE!



PLEASE, BE
CAREFUL! YOU
DON'T KNOW
THE RISK--

I SAID
SHUT UP!



OH, ERNEST. NOW
YOU'VE DONE IT.





I-IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, FACE! I DIDN'T MEAN TO HIT IT! I WAS AIMING FOR THE WOMAN! YOU KNOW THAT!

NONETHELESS, YOU'VE DESTROYED ONE OF THE PERFECT BEINGS OF THIS BEAUTIFUL, FLESHLESS WORLD. AND DO YOU KNOW THE IRONY OF IT, ERNEST?



YOU COULD HAVE BEEN ONE OF THOSE BEINGS. JUST AS YOUR FRIENDS WILL BE. NOW THAT THEIR SOULS HAVE BEEN FREED OF THE FLESH!

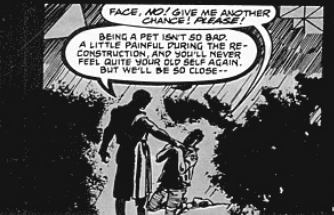
YES, THEY WILL BE BACK, ERNEST! BUT NOT YOU! NOT AS SOMETHING SO PURE AND PERFECT!



WE HAVE A CHAMBER IN HELL FOR THE LIKES OF YOU! WE CENOBITES LIKE OUR PETS. THE SAME AS YOU DO, BUT OURS ARE MORE... COMPLEX!



SOME ASSEMBLY IS REQUIRED.



FACE, NO! GIVE ME ANOTHER CHANCE! PLEASE!

BEING A PET ISN'T SO BAD. A LITTLE PAINFUL DURING THE RE-CONSTRUCTION, AND YOU'LL NEVER FEEL QUITE YOUR OLD SELF AGAIN. BUT WE'LL BE SO CLOSE--



IT COULD BE THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP...





WHAT I MOST REMEMBER
ARE THE SMOELLS, THE
SWEET SMOELLS OF PARIS
IN SEPTEMBER...

...IN THE YEAR OF
OUR LORD 1925.

NOW, THEY CALL THEM THE **CRAZY YEARS**, BUT
THEY WERE SO MUCH MORE. THEY RESHAPE
THE OLD ORDER, SWEEP AWAY WHAT LITTLE THE
GREAT WAR HAD LEFT.

PARIS WAS THE CAPITAL
OF THE AVANT-GARDE,
JAZZ AND THE
SURREALISTS RESIDED
ON THE RIVE GAUCHE.

PICASSO, WHOSE PAINTINGS
SCANDALIZED THE BOURGEOIS,
PROUDLY PROCLAIMED:
"I'M NOT LOOKING,
I'VE FOUND IT!"



AND I, A NAIVE MIDWESTERN
BOY WHO HAD DECIDED TO
LIVE IN THE EYE OF THE
"TORNADO", SOUGHT A BED...

I STILL REMEMBER THE INTOXICATING
SMELL OF FREEDOM IN THE AIR, OF
FUTURES UNBOUND...

...OR RATHER, SOMEONE
WILLING TO TAKE A CHANCE
ON A STRUGGLING, YOUNG
POET, WITH NO MEANS OF
SUPPORT.

OTEL

...OF
REBIRTH!



I NEVER THINK OF THAT SMELL
WITHOUT BEING THE TALL,
GAUNT FIGURE OF JEAN
COCTEAU SITTING AT
LA COUPOLE.



HIS PLAIN-CHANT HAD STIRRED MY
BLOOD, MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE.
HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY
BECOMING A POET.



WHEN I ASKED IF HE
WOULD LOOK AT MY POEMS,
HE REMEMBERED MEETING
ME AT THE ADOLPH BRUNER
TEXT.

LATER, HE WROTE
ABOUT HIMSELF
AND POETRY:

"BY POURING MY BLUE INK IN THEM, I MADE
THE GHOSTS TURN VISIBLE. TO SAY THAT THE
TASK IS SIMPLE OR WITHOUT DANGER WOULD
BE INSANE, TO DARE DISTURB THE ANGELS.



AND THAT, HE TOLD ME,
MY POEMS DID NOT
DO!



BUT WHAT
COULD I
KNOW OF
DISTURBING
THE ANGELS
WHEN THE
ONLY THING
I HAD
EXPERIENCED
WERE THE
PURE SKIES...

...AND GOLDEN
FIELDS OF
MY NATIVE
KANSAS?

I REMEMBER
CASTING MY
EYES AROUND,
LOOKING FOR
A SIGN, ANY
SIGN.



THEN, I SAW IT,
THE EYE OF MAN.

IT WAS ONE OF THE
MANY BOOKSTORES
IN PARIS, DABBING
IN A MIXTURE OF
POETRY AND THE
OCCULT.



IT WAS EXACTLY
MY KIND OF
BOOKSTORE.

SO, HOW PERFECT THAT
IT SHOULD ALSO
ADVERTISE ROOMS
TO RENT, I
ENTERED, AND
THERE, I SAW
HER...



MELANIE.



SHE LOVED COCTEAU, RIMBAUD, AND EVEN LAUTREAMONT, WHOSE SCANDALS OF MALDORE HAD BEEN PAGESD AROUND MY COLLEGE IN SECRET.



I CAN STILL SMELL HER CHUTLE PERFUME, AS IT CUT THROUGH THE STORE'S MUSTY AIR...

...LIKE A BEAM OF SUNLIGHT PIERCING THE CLOUDS.



I ASKED IF SHE KNEW OF ANYTHING ELSE, AND CAUGHT HIS HESITATION.



WHATEVER SHE MIGHT HAVE SAID REMAINED UNVOICED, SILENCED BY THE ARRIVAL OF HER EMPLOYER.

SHE INTRODUCED HIM AS MONSIEUR DANIEL.



HE REPRIMANDED HER FOR NOT TELLING ME OF THE PENSION VENEUR, ALTHOUGH I CANNOT NOW RECALL IF HE ACTUALLY UTTERED THAT ACCURSED NAME.

THERE WAS NO THUNDERCLAP, NO BOLTS OF LIGHTNING IN THE SKY, MERELY THE SOFT-SPOKEN VOICE OF A YOUNG WOMAN; ONE I DID NOT HEED.



DANIEL EXPLAINED THAT IT HOUSED A COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS WHO LIVED THERE, FREE UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF A TRUST ARRANGED BY A DECEASED PATRON OF THE ARTS.

HE GAVE ME THE ADDRESS, AND INDICATED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A RECENT VACANCY.



I CLEARLY REMEMBER THAT HE SAID I WOULD BE WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS.

AND SO I WAS!



BUT I AM GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF.

THOSE WHO SPEAK OF POETS' INTUITION COULD NOT HAVE SEEN ME THAT DAY, FOR I FELT NOTHING BUT ELATION AT HAVING FOUND A PLACE TO STAY.

BUT ALL THAT CHANGED AS
SOON AS I ARRIVED AT
THE PENSION VIVIER.

IT WAS LOCATED IN A TRANQUIL
CUL-DE-SAC AND, AT FIRST,
I THOUGHT IT LOOKED LIKE
ANY AUSTERE, UNDEMANDING
FRENCH BOURGEOIS HOUSE.
BUT THEN, I FELT AN ODD
SENSE OF FINALITY ABOUT
IT.

IN THE DECLINING LIGHT OF
THE DAY ITS FACADE EXHIBED
AN AIR OF QUIET, OBSCURE
HATRED TOWARDS ITS SUR-
ROUNDINGS, THE KIND OF
HATRED THAT USUALLY
OFTEN FEELS TOWARDS
BEAUTY.

I THOUGHT OF THE SNOUT OF AN
OBSTINATE, EVIL BEAST, JUST
STANDING THERE, REFUSING TO
HEED HIS MASTER'S VOICE,
MEETING HIM INSTEAD WITH
WAVES OF SILENT LOATHING.

"I AM THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE,"
IT SEEMED TO PROCLAIM.
"DREADFUL SHALL BE THE HARM
TO YOUR SOUL IF YOU DARE
COME NIGH."

The Blood of a Poet

WRITER: R.J.M. LOFFICIER
ARTIST: JOHN RIDGWAY
LETTERS: GABRIEL SALADINO
COLORS: STEVE OLIFF

STILL THE HOUR WAS LATE, AND PASSING ANOTHER DAMP NIGHT BENEATH A BRIDGE HELD NO CHARM.



THE CONCIERGE WAS A GNOME-LIKE CREATURE, WHOSE NAME I LATER LEARNED WAS **SEBALD**. AT FIRST, HE LOOKED AT ME WITH SUSPICION.

BUT WHEN I MENTIONED M. DANIEL, HIS EYES CLEARED, AND HE CONFIRMED THAT INDEED THERE HAD BEEN AN UNEXPECTED VACANCY.



HE OFFERED TO TAKE ME TO **MONSIEUR BARBAC**, THE DIRECTEUR, WHO WOULD DECIDE WHETHER I COULD STAY.



I RECALL AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY HIS UNEALTHY WHEEZING AS WE CLIMBED THE GREAT MARBLE STAIRWAY LINED WITH OLD-FASHIONED OIL PAINTINGS.



HE CAUGHT MY QUESTIONING GLANCE, AND VOLUNTEERED THAT THEY WERE PORTRAITS OF THE **VENEUR** FAMILY.

NOW, OF COURSE, I WILL KNOW THE REASON FOR THE STRANGE SCRATCHES ON THE PAINTINGS, BUT THEN...



...THEN, I WAS BUT A NAIVE MIDWESTERN BOY.

SEBALD TOLD ME THAT BARBAC, LIKE MYSELF, WAS AN AUTHOR, AS I HAD NEVER HEARD OF HIM, I ASKED WHAT HE HAD WRITTEN.



"MONSIEUR BARBAC DOES NOT SO MUCH WRITE AS RECORD," CHUCKLED SEBALD, LEAVING ME TO PUZZLE HIS MEANING.

I CONFESS TO FORMING AN IMMEDIATE ANTIPATHY FOR BARBAC, ALTHOUGH HIS INVITATION TO ENTER WAS PERFECTLY CONGENIAL.



SEBALD, HE CURTLY DENIED.

OUR CONVERSATION REMAINED ON A FORMAL LEVEL. HE RECALLED SEVERAL ANECDOTES ABOUT HAVING HIMSELF ONCE BEEN A YOUNG, STARVING WRITER.

THERE WAS A FAINT FETID SMELL TO HIS APARTMENT, WHICH REMINDED ME OF THE OFFICE OF MR. CHRISTIAN, OUR TOWN'S UNDERTAKER. YET, EVERYTHING APPEARED WELL RELISHED AND CLEAN.

I NO LONGER RECALL WHAT I SAID, BUT MY CREDENTIALS MUST HAVE SATISFIED HIM...

...FOR HE OFFERED ME A SMALL STUDIO ON THE TOP FLOOR.



HE LED ME UP TO THE THIRD FLOOR, TOWARD ONE OF THOSE NARROW SERVICE STAIRWAYS THE FRENCH CALL *L'ESCALIER DE LA BONNE*--THE MAID'S STAIRS.

I COULDN'T GET THAT SMELL OUT OF MY NOSTRILS.



AND THEN, IN THAT CONFINED SPACE, I REALIZED FROM WHERE IT CAME.

HIM!



BARSAC EXPLAINED THE PENSION'S RULES, WHICH WERE FEW: DINNER AT EIGHT, NO OVERNIGHT GUESTS.

AND, DUE TO THE NATURE OF THE TRUST, THERE WAS AN OBLIGATION TO PRODUCE ART WHILE LIVING ON THE PREMISES.



I BEGAN TO REASSURE HIM THAT I HAD EVERY INTENTION OF BECOMING A FAMOUS POET...

...BUT HE TOLD ME NOT TO CONCERN MYSELF WITH THAT, APPARENTLY, NO ONE ELSE DID.



AFTER THE DARK CORRIDOR, THE COZY LITTLE STUDIO FELT LIKE HEAVEN. BESIDES, IT WAS FREE. WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

I TOOK IT.

TRADITION AT THE *PENSION VENEUR* REQUIRED FORMAL ATTIRE TO BE WORN AT DINNER, WHICH WAS HELD IN THE GREAT *SALLE A MANGER*--THE DINING ROOM.

THERE, BARSAC INTRODUCED ME TO THE OTHER ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE.

I THOUGHT I DETECTED A NOTE OF CONTEMPT IN HIS VOICE AS HE MADE THE PRESENTATION.

LEGEND, A STOUT, VITAL PAINTER...

...HEARTILY CHEWING ON MEAT THAT LOOKED DELICIOUSLY RARE.

CURVAL, A BLONDE, WAIF-- LIKE SCULPTRESS, WHO SEEMED COLD...

...AND REMOTE, AS SHE ATE WITHOUT PASSION.

MATHIEU, AN OLD MUSICIAN, WHOSE EYES WERE GLAZED AND WHO MUTTERED TO HIMSELF...

AND FINALLY, *RESTIF*...

...AN ENGINEER WHOSE PASSION WAS AUTOMATA AND CLOCK- WORK TOYS.

IT WAS HE WHO FIRST BROKE THE STRAINED SILENCE, OFFERING TO SHOW ME HIS WONDEROUS SINGING BIRDS.

"WHOSE BIRDS? YOURS--OR LEHARCHEMANS?" INTERRUPTED LEGEND PARASCATICALLY.

I DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE REFERENCE, BUT IT OBVIOUSLY INFURATED *RESTIF*, FOR THE TWO MEN BEGAN TO ARGUE.

...UNTIL BARSAC STOPPED IT WITH A FEW LURT, UN- CHALLENGED WORDS.

THAT WAS WHEN Mlle. CURVAL COM- PLAINED TO *SEBAUD* ABOUT HER MEAT.

AS HE WAS NOT ONLY CONCERGE AND BUTLER, BUT COOK AS WELL, I THOUGHT IT INTERESTING.

"WE STILL WHIP DOGS IN THIS HOUSE," SAID BARSAC, TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR.

BUT SOMEHOW, WE ALL KNEW WHOM HE MEANT.

NEVER BEFORE HAD I SEEN SUCH PURE HATRED RADIATE FROM A MAN AS I SAW FROM *SEBAUD* THAT NIGHT.

WHEN WE REACHED THE LOMBARDINE, I ASKED Mlle. CURVAL ABOUT HER SCULPTURES, BUT ELICITED VERY LITTLE RESPONSE.

NO ONE APPEARED INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING THEIR WORK, EXCEPT FOR LÉGRAND, WHO MADE ANOTHER OF HIS CRYPTICALLY SARCASTIC REMARKS...



"OH, BUT WE'RE ALL QUITE FAMOUS IN CERTAIN QUARTERS", HE SAID WITH AN ANNOYING CHUCKLE.

THAT'S WHEN BARSAC TOLD HIM HE HAD ENOUGH WINE.



SUDDENLY SOMETHING SEEMED TO GRIP MATHIEU.



HE BEGAN SHAKING VIOLENTLY, SPOWING SOUP EVERYWHERE.

PETIT MAL, I THOUGHT, AN EPILEPTIC FIT.



HE RABBLER INCOHERENTLY...



...ABOUT A PLATE OF 'LOVE' HEADS.



BARSAC REMARKED THAT MATHIEU HAD BEEN WORKING TOO HARD LATELY AND APOLOGIZED ON HIS BEHALF.



I CAUGHT LÉGRAND SHAKING HIS HEAD IN BEMUSED TOLERANCE, THE WAY A TEACHER WOULD AT A STUDENT'S PRANK.

SEBASTIEN ENTERED AND DRAGGED THE POOR WRETCH FROM THE ROOM.



PERHAPS THEY ARE PLAYING TRICKS WITH MY MEMORY, AND NONE OF THIS HAPPENED. BUT THAT IS HOW I RECALL MY FIRST DINNER AT THE PENSION VENEUR.

THE FIRST NIGHT, AS I WORKED ON A NEW SCENE, I DOZED OFF AND BEHELD MONSTRIOUS VISIONS SUCH AS I HAD NEVER BEEN BEFORE.

COULD THESE HAVE BEEN THE ANGELS GUSTAVE HAD ADVISED ME TO DISTURB?

SLOWLY, BLOOD BEGAN TO SEEP FROM BENEATH MY FINGERNAILS.

FINALLY I COULD STAND IT NO LONGER. I SCREAMED...

THEN, I HEARD ANOTHER SCREAM.

WAS I STILL DREAMING?

AS I REACHED THE DOOR, I STOPPED FOR IN THE PALLID LIGHT, SOMETHING HAD SUDDENLY CAUGHT MY EYE.

A NAME WAS SCRATCHED INTO THE FRAME...

PAQUET

AND THAT BEST DESCRIBES HOW I FELT THAT FIRST NIGHT, AS SLOWLY I SANK, BODY AND SOUL, INTO THE STYGIAN DEPTHS OF THE PENSION VENEUR.

I WOKE UP AND IMMEDIATELY BEGAN COMMITTING THESE IMAGES TO PAPER, ENGAGING IN WHAT THE SURREALISTS CALLED AUTOMATIC WRITING.

MY NERVES STILL TINGLED, AND SUCH ACTION PROVED EXCRUCIATINGLY PAINFUL, YET I PERSEVERED.

...AND AWOKÉ.

IT WAS YET ANOTHER DREAM. MY FINGERS WERE UNHARMED.

...BUT FRESH BLOOD STAINED MY NOTE-BOOK.

THE TAO SAYS: "A MAN DREAMS THAT HE IS A BUTTERFLY. WHEN HE AWAKES, HE IS NOT SURE IF HE IS A MAN WHO DREAMED HE WAS A BUTTERFLY, OR A BUTTERFLY WHO DREAMS HE IS A MAN."



DAVIN BROUGHT
SMALL BUZZOR.



I HAD DECIDED I WOULD
TRY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
THE MYSTERIOUS PAGNET.

MY FIRST STEP WAS TO
STOP BY SEBAUD'S
LOBBY.



HE DID NOT WELCOME
MY INQUIRIES, AND IN-
DEED APPEARED TO
REBUFF THEM.



ONLY MY INSISTENCE
CAUSED HIM TO RELENT,
AND REVEAL THAT PAGNET
WAS THE PREVIOUS OWNER
OF THE STUDIO.



STILL, NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED,
I COULD NOT EXTRACT MORE INFORMATION
THAN THAT FROM HIM.

MULLING THIS, I
DECIDED TO
ASK BARSAC.



HOWEVER, MY KNOCK
YIELDED NO ANSWER.

DID HE IGNORE ME, OR
DID HE JUST SLEEP
SOUNDLY, I NEVER KNEW.



THEN, I NOTICED THAT
THE NEXT DOOR OVER
WAS AJAR. IT WAS
RESTIF'S APARTMENT.

ALREADY, UNCONSCIOUS
FEARS BURROWED THROUGH
MY SUBCONSCIOUS, CAUSING
ME TO BELIEVE
SUSPICIOUS...



...OTHERWISE, WHAT COULD
HAVE POSSESSED ME TO
ENTER IT UNINVITED?



WAS IT OIL, GREASE, OR SOME KIND
OF MONSTROUS ICHOR THAT
OOZED FROM THE SPILLED GUTS
OF RESTIF'S MECHANICAL CREATIONS?

THE WHIRR OF THE GOGG DROINED
ON, IN AN ENDLESS MOCKERY OF
LIFE. AND THERE, IN THE CENTER
OF IT ALL...

HOW DOES A YOUNG BIRD REACT TO
THE FIRST SNAKE?

CAN OUR SOULS RECOGNIZE
THINGS OUR EYES HAVE
NEVER DEHELD?

I APPROACHED THE
THING, AND NEVER
SAW REBTIF COME
IN BEHIND ME.

WORDLESSLY, HE THREW A SHEET
OVER IT. THERE WAS AN ODD
RESPECT TO HIS GESTURE.

I MUTTERED SOME
WORDS OF APOLOGY,
THOUGH THESE FELL
ON DEAF EARS.

BUT I HAD NOT FORGOTTEN
MY ORIGINAL PURPOSE. I
ASKED ABOUT PAQUET.

"HE WENT. THEY ALL
WENT," HE DEPLIED,
DISMISSIVELY.

"THEY ALL WENT?"

I WAS ABOUT TO PRESS
FOR MORE WHEN THE
SOUND OF BARGAC'S
VOICE COMING FROM
JUST OVER MY SHOULDER
CAUSED ME TO JUMP.

WITH HIS USUAL CURT TONE, HE SENT
A GRUNDLING REBTIF SCURRYING.

IT ALL SEEMED
SO BANAL ON
THE SURFACE.

THE FRIENDLY ECCENTRIC OF THE
PREVIOUS NIGHT HAD TURNED
INTO A WALL OF SOLID IN-
DIFFERENCE.

AS TRIVIAL AS BARGAC'S
EVENTUAL EXPLANATIONS
ABOUT PAQUET, GIVEN LATER
THAT MORNING, AS HE LED ME
PAST SEBAUD'S WATCHFUL
EYES.

AFTER ALL THIS TIME, I HAVE FORGOTTEN
WHAT THEY WERE, BUT I DO RECALL THEY
WERE RENDERED UTTERLY UNBELIEVABLE
BY THE OPPRESSIVE ATROCIOUSNESS OF THE
PENSION VENEUR.



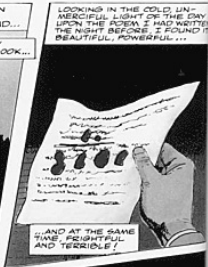
IN THE STREET, THE SUFFOCATING ENVIRONMENT OF THE FRENCH SEEMED UNREAL.

I BREATHED LONG AND DEEP, CLEANING MY LUNGS OF THE NOXIOUS ATMOSPHERE THAT HELD SWAY WITHIN.



I FELT A PRESSURE UPON MY BREAST, THE GENTLE NUDGE OF A CLOSE FRIEND...

MY NOTEBOOK...



LOOKING IN THE COLD, UNMERCIFUL LIGHT OF THE DAY UPON THE POEM I HAD WRITTEN THE NIGHT BEFORE, I FOUND IT BEAUTIFUL, POWERFUL...

...AND AT THE SAME TIME, FRIGHTFUL AND TERRIBLE!



COULD IT TRULY HAVE BEEN ME, THE INNOCENT AMERICAN BOY, WHO HAD WRITTEN SUCH MONSTROUS VERSE?

HAD MY NIGHT'S FEVERISH VISIONS (FOR WHAT ELSE COULD THEY BE?) INSPIRED ME TO SUCH HEIGHTS?

MY ALMOST GOMNAMBULIC MEANDERING SOMEHOW LED ME BACK TO THE EYE OF PAN...



...TO MELANIE...



MY SOUR FACE MUST HAVE TOLD HIM MUCH ABOUT MY FEELINGS.

I QUITE CLEARLY RECALL MENTIONING HOW UN-SATISFIED I WAS WITH BARSAC'S EXPLANATION OF PAGUET'S DIS-APPEARANCE.

DANIEL ROSE TO THE DEFENSE, MAKING PRE-POSTEROUS CLAIMS ABOUT BARSAC'S RESPECTABILITY...



...AND TO HER EVER-SO-HELPFUL EMPLOYER, MONSIEUR DANIEL.

HE RECOGNIZED ME AS I ENTERED AND PROBABLY FELT BURN BY CONVICTION TO AS IF I LIKED MY NEW HOME.



...WHEN ANOTHER CLIENT FORCED HIM TO ABANDON ME TO MY OWN DESIGNS...

HE HAD STARTED SPINNING A YARN...

...WHICH SUITED ME JUST FINE.



THE ONE I HAD REALLY COME TO SEE
STEPPED FROM BEHIND A SHELF, AND
TOLD ME THAT DANIEL WAS LYING...

...WHICH EVEN THEN,
I REMEMBER, CAME
AS NO GREAT SUR-
PRISE TO ME.



WHAT I DID NOT KNOW, HOWEVER,
AND WHAT I LEARNED THAT DAY
FROM MELANIE'S WHISPER IN MY
EAR, WAS THAT...

DANIEL WAS
SEBAUD'S
BROTHER!



IT WAS THEN THAT I
UNDERSTOOD NOW HE
HAD COME TO SEND
ME TO THE PENSION,
BUT NOT YET WHY.



MELANIE TOLD ME OF OTHER
YOUNG, STRUGGLING ARTISTS
SENT THERE BEFORE ME,
BUT NONE HAD NEVER
BEEN SEEN, OR HEARD
FROM, AGAIN!

THAT WAS
TO COME
LATER.

MELANIE'S CURIOSITY, HAD MADE
HER DISTRUSTFUL OF THE MYSTERIOUS
PENSION VENEUR...

...HENCE HER EARLIER
RELUCTANCE TO SEND
ME THERE.



AS REGIS HAD SAID:
"THEY ALL WENT."

WE AGREED TO MEET THE
FOLLOWING DAY--HER
DAY OFF--AT "THE LUX"
EMBOURS GARDENS.



THAT NIGHT, DINNER WAS, IF ANYTHING, MORE BIZARRE AND REPULSIVE THAN BEFORE.

RESTIF WAS FURIOUS AT NOT BEING ABLE TO ASSEMBLE OR DISASSEMBLE SOMETHING, A MACHINE? THERE WAS MUCH I MUST HAVE MISSED.



"LE MARCHAND COULD DO IT. WHY CAN'T I?" HE SHOUTED.

BUT ONE THING I COULD NEVER FORGET: THAT NAME.



BARSAC TRIED TO GET HIM TO SHUT UP BUT RESTIF WOULD NOT BE SILENCED.

LEGRAND CALLED HIM A "BRICOLEUR"... A TINKERER.



MATHEU HAD ANOTHER FIT, BUT NO ONE SEEMED TO CARE, OR NOTICE.

DEAR LORD, NO ONE EVEN LISTED A FINGER TO HELP HIM!

HE ROLLED ON THE FLOOR, FROTHING, FOAMING.

I TURNED FOR HELP...



... BUT LEGRAND AND CURIAL WERE FIGHTING, SHOUTING THE FOULEST OBSCENITIES, EMITTING ANIMAL-LIKE GRUNTS.

AND YET, IT LOOKED LIKE... A RITUAL?



I DIDN'T DARE APPROACH HIM. I WAS AFRAID TO KNOW.

INSTEAD, LIKE THE LAMB WHO DETECTS THE TOBER'S ARRIVAL FROM ITS RANK BREATH...

AT LAST, MATHEU LAY STILL.



... I RAN AWAY.



THAT SECOND NIGHT, THE FRAGILE BOUNDARIES
BETWEEN MY SOUL AND THE HORRORS WHICH
SUFFUSED THE PENSION VENEUR JUST
CRUMBLING AWAY.



AS MY BRAIN BURNED,
I TRIED TO SHUT OUT
THE VISIONS, BUT IN VAIN.

I CURSED THE WHITE HOT FLOW
OF WORDS THAT TRIED TO ESCAPE
THROUGH MY BLEEDING FINGERS.



I SOUGHT ONLY TO REACH
THE COOL REFUGE OF THE
DARKNESS OUTSIDE.



AS I RAN FROM MY ROOM,
THE NAME ON THE DOOR
MOCKINGLY REMINDED ME
OF THE AS YET UNSUSPECTED
FATE WHICH LAY AHEAD.

PAQUET



ON THE SECOND FLOOR,
I NOTICED THAT A DOOR
WAS AJAR. LIGHT
SPILLED OUT INTO
THE DARKNESS.

IT WAS
LEGRAND'S
ROOM.



I HESITATED
BUT A MOMENT.



THE ROOM WAS FILLED WITH WEIRD,
OBSCURE PRINTINGS AND SCULPTURES,
NONE OF THEM WERE AS SICKENING
AS ITS TWO HUMAN OCCUPANTS.



BARELY BOTHERING TO STOP THEIR LOATHSOME BEHAVIOR, THEY INVITED ME IN.

CURLY EVEN DARED SUGGEST THAT I JOIN THEM. I SHRANK BACK IN TERROR.



LEGRAND CALLED ME A FOOL AND A COWARD.

HE DRAGGED THAT ALL THE PENSION'S RESIDENTS PURVEYED WORKS OF A NATURE SO FILTHY AND FERVOR, I COULD BARELY COMPREHEND IT. THEIR CREATIONS COMMANDED HIGH PRICES FROM SECRET COLLECTORS WHOSE PURSUAIVED TASTES THRIVED ON SUCH ABOMINATIONS.



HE SAUNTED ME, CALLING ME A HYPOCRITE, TURNING UP MY NOSE AT THEM. YET, DRINKING FROM THE SAME SOURCE.



I RAN TO MY ROOM, THEIR FOUL, MOCKING LAUGHTER STILL RINGING IN MY EARS.

HAD I TRULY ACCEPTED THE MEANING OF HIS WORDS, I COULD STILL HAVE ESCAPED THE PENSION'S INSIDIOUS TRAP.



BUT AS I LOOKED AT MY NIGHT'S WORK, I SAW THAT, AS MORBID AND DECADENT AS IT WAS, MY POETRY HAD GAINED A LIFE AND A STRENGTH IT HAD NEVER HAD BEFORE.

I FELT AN ELATION WHICH HORRIFIED ME MORE THAN THE POETRY ITSELF.



THE PENSION WAS NURTURING MY CREATIVITY INTO SOME SNARLED AND TWISTED SHAPES.

WHAT WAS THE COST FOR THIS NEWFOUND EXCELLENCE? WAS I BECOMING A MONSTER, LIKE THE OTHERS?

WAS THAT WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO FAGNET?

THE NEXT MORNING, I SAW
A HEARSE AND TWO
UNDERTAKERS OUTSIDE.

I WAS NOT THE LEAST BIT
SURPRISED. DEATH SEEMED
A NATURAL VISITOR TO THE
PENNSION VENEUR.

... WHO REVEALED THAT
MATHIEU HAD KILLED
HIMSELF DURING THE NIGHT.

HE FEIGNED AN UNCTIOUS
COMPLAISON WHICH HE QUITE
OBVIOUSLY DID NOT FEEL.

I OVERHEARD ONE REMARK
THAT HE'D NEVER SEEN
ANYONE DO THEMSELVES
IN SUCH A HORRIBLE WAY.

THE OTHER REPLIED ABOUT A CASE
HE'D ONCE SEEN. THEY GLOUSHLY
BEGAN TO COMPARE NOTES.

AS I WALKED PAST THEM,
I CAUGHT A SHRED OF
THEIR CONVERSATION...

"I THOUGHT
HE'D NEVER GO!"
BARGAC SAID.

I ASKED
SEBALD...

THE TWO UNDERTAKERS WERE
TRADITIONAL CROQUE-MORTS--
CRUNCHERS OF THE DEAD--THE
COLORFUL NAME THE FRENCH GIVE
TO THOSE TRAFFICKERS IN DEATH.

BARGAC AND LEBRAND STOOD
NEARBY, WATCHING THE PRO-
CEEDINGS...

I MET MELANIE IN THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS.

THE BRIGHT, SUNNY AFTERNOON MADE THE HORRORS OF THE PENSION LOOK EVEN MORE UNREAL.



MELANIE TOLD ME THE PENSION VENEUR USED TO BELONG TO A MAN NAMED LEMARCHAND, A STRANGE MAKER OF PUZZLE BOXES AND OTHER WEIRD MECHANICAL WONDERS, SOMEONE WITH A DECIDEDLY UNSAVORY REPUTATION.



ONE DAY HE DISAPPEARED. NO ONE KNEW HOW, WHY OR WHERE.



A HOUSE OF DEATH. A HOUSE OF PAIN.

FOR ALL SHE KNEW, LEMARCHAND MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE FOUNDER OF THE TRUST THAT KEPT THE PENSION GOING.

THE HOUSE ITSELF WAS BUILT UPON THE CATACOMBS; BONE POWDER WAS MIXED INTO ITS VERY MORTAR, BLOOD USED IN ITS CEMENT.

SHE URGED ME NOT TO RETURN. I FELT COMPELLED TO GO.

I KNEW THEN THAT IF I REMAINED AT THE PENSION, I COULD BECOME THE BEST POST WHO HAD EVER LIVED.

THAT WAS MY CALLING. I SUPPOSE IT COULD BE SAID THAT IT WAS IN MY BLOOD.

I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN, BUT I LIKE TO THINK THAT SHE CRIED AS I RAN BACK TO THE PENSION IN THE RAPIDLY FALLING DUSK.



LATER, I CONFRONTED BARGAC IN HIS APARTMENT.

HE WAS EXPECTING THE ENCOUNTER, IN HIS EYES, I WAS A RESOURCEFUL YOUNG MAN, BUT A FOOL, NONE THE LESS.

HE FREELY ADMITTED THAT EACH OF THE PENSION'S RESIDENTS WAS BEHOLDEN TO SOMETHING OR SOMEONE HE CALLED... THE CENOBITES.

THEY WISHED US ALL TO PRODUCE WORK OF SO HORRIFYING A NATURE THAT FEW BUT THOSE BELLISH CREATURES COULD EVEN MANAGE TO STAND ITS SIGHT.

IN EXCHANGE, THEY ALLOWED THE ARTISTS TO SELL SOME OF THE LESSER PIECES ON THAT ABOMINABLE BLACK MARKET, WHERE IT STILL FETCHED INCREDIBLE PRICES.

AND SPEAKING OF PRICES, THERE WAS A PRICE TO PAY. "A SMALL ONE," BARGAC SAID.

THE CENOBITES PERIODICALLY REQUIRED THE DELIVERY OF NEW VICTIMS, HENCE THE DISAPPEARANCES OF PAQUOT AND THE OTHER YOUNG ARTISTS WHO HAD PRECEDED ME.

THE TIME HAD COME TO HONOR THE AGE-OLD BARGAIN; SUMMON THE CENOBITES TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THEIR NEW OFFERING.

I TRIED TO LEAP AT BARGAC, BUT LEGRAND AND REGIER SUDDENLY SEIZED ME.

I FELT THE SAME WRETCHED HELP-LESSNESS WHICH MUST BE FELT BY THE MAN ON THE GUILLOTINE, AS HE WAITS FOR THE BLADE TO FALL.





ACTING ON BARGAC'S REQUEST,
KEITH ACTIVATED THE
MYSTERIOUS DEVICE.

LEMARCHAND'S CURSED
MACHINE ACCOMPLISHED
ITS WONDROUS, DEVILISH
WORK.

THE
CENOBITES
ARRIVED.

THEY BROUGHT A FITFUL
PHOSPHORESCENCE, LIKE
THE GLOW OF DEEP-SEA
LIFE, AND A SMELL OF
VANILLA, WHICH BARELY
HID THE STENCH BENEATH.

I WELCOMED THEM
WITH AN EMOTIONLESS
SPEECH.

I NO LONGER DAMNED THE FLOW OF
SAD POETRY WHICH WELLED WITHIN
ME. OH, COCTEAU, IF YOU COULD HAVE
HEARD ME THEN!

NOT ONLY DID I DISTURB YOUR
PRECIOUS ANGELS, BUT I SHREDDED
THEIR SILKEN WINGS AND DRANK
THEIR HEAVENLY ISCHOR.

I BECAME THE CENOBITES' PERFECT
INSTRUMENT, GLORIFYING THE ONLY
FEELINGS WHICH THEY COULD STILL
EXPERIENCE.

I PROVED I COULD SERVE THEM BETTER
THAN BARGAC, A DRIED-OUT HUSK: LIKE
MATHIEU, AN EMPTY VESSEL, FIT ONLY TO
BE DISCARDED.



THE
CENOBITES
STOPPED.

BARSAC BEGAN TO
RANT. HE SHOUTED
AT THEM TO TAKE
ME.

BUT I SHOWED THEM
HOW TO TRANSLATE
PAIN INTO BEAUTY...

...AND TO THIS, EVEN THE
MIGHTY CENOBITES PAUSED
TO LISTEN.

I KNEW THEN THAT I HAD WON.

THEY MOVED TOWARDS BARSAC. TERRIFIED,
HE UTTERED A SMALL ANIMAL WHINE, THEN
TURNED AND FLED.

LEGRAND AND CERVUL
MIGHT AS WELL HAVE
BEEN MADE OF STONE
FOR THEY MOVED NOT
AN INCH TO AID HIM.

NOT SO GEBALD,
WHO REMEMBERED
OLD ACCOUNTS YET
TO BE SETTLED!

MY LAST MEMORY OF THAT
FATEFUL NIGHT WAS OF THE
CENOBITES DRAGGING BARSAC
AWAY TO WHATEVER FATE I HAD
UNDOUBTEDLY INKURED FOR
HIM IN MY DEMENTED VESSES.

THEN, MERCIFULLY,
I LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

THE MORNING SUN WOKE ME, AND FOUND ME IN MY BED.

FLEETLY I PRAYED IT HAD ALL BEEN A NIGHTMARE, YET KNEW PERFECTLY WELL THE HORRIBLE TRUTH.

GÉBAUD WELCOMED ME, AND TOLD ME BARGAC'S APARTMENT WOULD BE READY FOR ME TO MOVE INTO BY EARLY THAT EVENING.

I TRIED TO EXPLAIN I HAD ONLY FOLLOWED HIS MAD ADVICE TO SAVE MY LIFE. I DID NOT WANT TO BECOME LIKE BARGAC.

BUT HE SAID I HAD NO CHOICE. IT WAS TO BE MY DESTINY.

I FLED TO THE STREETS TO ESCAPE HIS MONSTROUS HONESTY.

HE YELLED AFTER ME-- "DINNER AT EIGHT, YOUNG MASTER!"

I RAN TOWARDS THE ONE AND ONLY PERSON WHOM I THOUGHT COULD STILL SAVE ME FROM THAT ABYSS...

MELANIE!

DANIEL WAS ALONE.

I ASKED ABOUT HER.

HE THREW HIS ARMS UP IN THE AIR, IN A TYPICAL GALLIC SHRUG.

"IT IS A BIG MALHEUR, MONSIEUR!" HE SAID, AN UNFORTUNATE EVENT.

SHE HAD DIED THAT MORNING, STABBED BY A MUGGER, AN INNOCENT VICTIM OF THE CITY'S MADNESS.

THE REST OF HIS SANCTIMONIOUS CLICHÉS WERE DROWNED OUT BY THE SOUND OF THE BRASS GATES OF HELL CLOSING UPON MY COLD HEART.









SONGS OF METAL AND FLESH

molto agitato

PETER AKINS
WRITER

DAVE DORMAN & LURENE HAINES
ARTISTS

PHIL FELIX
LETTERER



BEAUTY COMES IN
AT THE BYE. THAT'S
WHAT THEY TELL YOU.



BUT THAT REALLY
UNDERSELLS THE
WORLD'S GENEROSITY.
DON'T YOU THINK I
DWELL FOR A MOMENT
ON THE SMELL OF A
BEAUTIFUL WOMAN...



CONCENTRATE ON THE
FEEL OF THE ROSE
PETAL. THINK ON THE
TASTE OF THE BS-
LOVED'S TONGUE...



AND, MOST OF ALL,
LISTEN. LISTEN TO
THE WORLD AS IT
SINGS TO YOU...



ENJOY. ENJOY. I KNOW
I USED TO. FOR ME NOW
IT'S DIFFERENT. FOR
ME NOW IT'S TRUE...

BEAUTY COMES
IN AT THE BYE.

WHICH IS
PRETTY
IRONIC,
GIVEN MY
HISTORY...

THIRTY
YEARS
AGO...

I'M SORRY,
MRS. MARLOWE.
THERE'S NO
CHANGE.

NO
CHANGE AT
ALL. NOR IS
THERE LIKELY
TO BE.

YOUR SON...
JASON...
HE'S BLIND.
MRS. MAR-
LOWE. AND
HE'LL BE
BLIND FOR
THE REST OF
HIS LIFE.

BIG
NEWS.

BUT, YOU KNOW, HIS OTHER
SENSES WILL COMPENSATE.
HAVE PROBABLY ALREADY
BEGUN TO...

HE DIDN'T KNOW
THE HALF OF IT. I
WAS HARDLY EVEN
LISTENING. I WAS
BUSY SUCKING IN
THE SENSUAL
DETAILS OF THE
WORLD.

I COULD HEAR THE RUSTLE OF THEIR
UNDERWEAR AS THEY SPOKE.

I COULD SMELL
THE UNDER-
CURRENT OF
AROUSAL IN HIS
RESPONSE TO
MY MOTHER...

TINY RUSTLES OF PAPER
AND GLASS AS BREEZES
UNDETECTABLE BY MOST
ENTERED HIS ROOM
THROUGH GAPS IN HIS
GLAZIER'S EFFICIENCY.

SLEAW
HOPPER
CARTER
HOPPER

SUBTLE TINGLES ON MY
TONGUE AS TRACES OF
HIS CHEMICALS MATED
WITH MY TASTE-BUDS.

...COULD HEAR THE CONTRACTIONS
IN HIS THROAT AS HE TRIED TO
GULP IT INTO HIDING. COULD AL-
MOST FEEL THE HEAT FROM HIS
FLUSHING CHEEKS.

WHAT WAS I MISSING?
REBUNDANT ILLUSTRATIONS
OF THINGS I ALREADY KNEW.

I HAD ALL I
NEEDED.

IT'S JUST...
IT'S JUST THAT
IT HURTS. WHEN
I THINK OF ALL
HE'LL MISS WHEN
I THINK OF ALL
HE'S MISSING...

SMELL. SOUND. TOUCH. TASTE.



... AND MUSIC!

I COULD
HEAR MUSIC.

I COULD
FEEL MUSIC.
I COULD
ALMOST
SMELL IT.



IT DISPLACES THE
AIR, YOU KNOW.
IT CHANGES
REALITY.



IT'S SOLID. IT
TAKES UP SPACE.
I NEEDED TO
TOUCH IT...

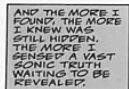


... TO MAKE IT
... TO FIND IT ...



THEY CALLED ME A PRODIGY.
THEY CALLED ME INVENTIVE.
I WASN'T INVENTING. I WAS
UNCOVERING.

I WAS CAPTURING
FOR THE DEPRIVED
WORLD THE HIDDEN
MELODIES IT WAS
TOO DEAF TO
HEAR FOR ITSELF.



AND THE MORE I
FOUND, THE MORE
I KNEW WAS
STILL HIDDEN.
THE MORE I
SENSED A VAST
SONIC TRUTH
WAITING TO BE
REVEALED.



AND I TRUST
NONE OF US NEED
ANY MORE CONVINCING
OF WHY JASON MARLOWE
HAS BEEN ACCEPTED
INTO OUR SCHOLAR-
SHIP PROGRAMME...

I DIDN'T LISTEN TO THE
FLANNEL. I DIDN'T NEED
IT. HE WAS RIGHT. BUT
THE GHOSTS OF THE
NOTES DYING AROUND
ME WERE INFINITELY
MORE INTERESTING.



THE ACADEMY WAS GOOD FOR ME.
AT FIRST, NOT JUST MUSIC, BUT
FRIENDS. MORE THAN FRIENDS.
THERE WAS DEBORAH.

IT'S
SAFE.
BE WITH
ME.

SHE SOUNDED
SWEETER THAN
RUNNING WATER
THROUGH REEDS.



SHE SMILED MORE
BEAUTIFUL THAN
MEADOWS AFTER
SPRING RAIN.



THE
TASTE
OF
HER
SHAMED
HONEY.



TOUCHING HER WAS LIKE
PRESSING YOUR HAND TO
THE BEACHES OF HEAVEN.

AND THE SOUNDS OF HER
PLEASURE WERE THE NEAREST
SONG COULD COME TO THOSE
HIDDEN MELODIES, THOSE
MYSTERIOUS HARMONIES
THAT I KNEW GIGGLED
SOMEWHERE BETWEEN OUR
WORLD AND THE NEXT.



I LEARNED
OTHER
THINGS
AT THE
ACADEMY,
TOO...



RIVALRY...
JEALOUSY...

STEPHEN
MIDDLETON
WAS THE BEST
THE ACADEMY
HAD, APART
FROM ME.



HIS ENVIOUS HATRED SWAM IN
THE AIR AROUND HIM EACH TIME
WE SPOKE, DESPITE HIS
FRIENDLY WORDS.

YOU REALLY ARE SOMETHING
SPECIAL, JASON. SOMETHING
QUITE DIFFERENT FROM
THE REST OF US.

THAT'S NONSENSE.
YOU'RE GOOD.

IT'S TRUE. I AM. I'M
BLOODY GOOD. BUT
YOU'RE... DIFFERENT.
YOU MAKE IT ALL
SEEM... NATURAL.
EASY.

IT IS EASY. THAT'S
THE POINT. IT'S NOT
ABOUT WORK, IT'S...
LET ME SHOW YOU.

YOU SEE, YOU THINK OF
IT AS SOMETHING YOU
HAVE TO MAKE OUT OF
NOTHING. NO. IT'S ALL
THERE. JUST LET IT ALL
OUT AND THEN CATCH
WHAT YOU WANT...

JUST LET IT ALL OUT.
JUST LISTEN. LISTEN
AND SNATCH.

THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD
A LITTLE SECRET, BUT I
KNEW. I COULD HEAR
THEM. I COULD SMELL
THEIR CRUEL EXCITEMENT.

FASCINATING...
I THINK I'M
BEGINNING TO
UNDER-
STAND.

BUT I
PLAYED
ALONG.





IT WAS DAWN WHEN
I GOT HOME.

I SHOULD
HAVE KNOWN.

SHOULD HAVE
SMELLED THAT GUILTY
COCKTAIL OF
SWEAT AND RUST.



SHOULD HAVE
FELT HOW
THE PIANO'S
DISCOMFORT
PREFIGURED
MY PAIN.

BUT DEBORAH'D
LEFT ME EXHAUSTED
AND INSPIRED.



A DANGEROUS
COMBINATION.





NOTHING WAS PROVED. I DIDN'T WANT IT TO BE. THEY'D GIVEN ME A LOT TO THINK ABOUT. I WAS VERY GRATEFUL.



THE COUNTERPOINT BETWEEN HER MOUTH'S PLATITUDES AND HER BODY'S EXCITEMENT WAS MAGNIFICENT, LIKE PUTTING AN A NATURAL IN A D SHARP MINOR, LIKE BITING INTO A STRAWBERRY AND FINDING AN ANGRY WASP.



I COULD SMELL IT. I COULD TASTE IT. MY BODY BATHED IN THE SWEET SATISFACTION THAT MY MAIMING BROUGHT HER.



DEBORAH EVEN VISITED. THAT WAS ESPECIALLY GOOD.

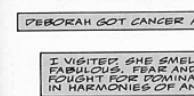


OUR WORLDS DIVERGED.



STEPHEN GOT THE GLAMOUR. THE TOURS. THE RECORDINGS.

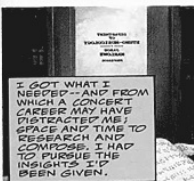
HE BETRAYED DEBORAH IN EVERY TOWN HE PERFORMED IN. I LIKED THAT.



DEBORAH GOT CANCER AND DIED.



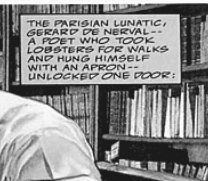
I VISITED. SHE SMELLED FABULOUS. FEAR AND PAIN FOUGHT FOR DOMINANCE IN HARMONIES OF ANGUISH.



I GOT WHAT I NEEDED--AND FROM WHICH A CONCERT CAREER MAY HAVE DISTRACTED ME; SPACE AND TIME TO RESEARCH AND COMPOSE. I HAD TO PURSUE THE INSIGHTS I'D BEEN GIVEN.



I WORKED LONG HOURS BUT NOT LONELY ONES. I HAD MY BOOKS IN BRAILLE, MY BOOKS ON TAPE. I HAD CENTURIES OF HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE TO KEEP ME COMPANY.



THE PARISIAN LUNATIC, GERARD DE NERVAL-- A POET WHO TOOK LOBSTERS FOR WALKS AND HUNG HIMSELF WITH AN APRON-- UNLOCKED ONE DOOR:



"LET US RECOMPOSE THE DISONANT SCALE AND WE WILL GAIN POWER IN THE WORLD OF THE SPIRITS."



HE WAS RIGHT. MUSIC WAS A PUZZLE. A VAST INCOMPREHENSIBLE MYSTERY WHICH ALLOWED INITIATES AT BEST A GLIMPSE OF THE MAGIC WORLD IT HINTED AT. THERE WERE NEW SCALES TO DISCOVER, NEW CONJUNCTIONS OF NOTES TO REVEAL. MELODIES OF UNIVERSAL MALICE. SYMPHONIES OF SUFFERING.



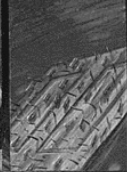
EVERY TIME WE FOUND SOMETHING CONSONANT AND SWEET AND THOUGHT WE GLIMPSED THE FACE OF GOD, WE'D BEEN SIDE-TRACKED AND FOOLED INTO EASY SOLUTIONS. THERE WAS A BIGGER MUSIC. A DARKER SONG OF TERRIBLE BEAUTY. I WOULD OPEN THE EARS OF THE WORLD TO THE SCREAMS OF MOUNTAINS IN TORMENT, TO THE DEATH-cries OF DRAGONS, TO THE ETERNAL MOANS OF THE UNIVERSE AS ITS WOUNDS SPLIT OPEN TO BLEED SPACE AND COOZE PLANETS.

I KNEW THE PUZZLE WAS SOLVABLE. I KNEW I WOULD FIND THE CLUSTER OF NOTES THAT WOULD OPEN THE DOOR TO THE OCCULT. I HAD HELP. SPIRIT GUIDES WOULD COME TO ME FROM THE WORLD OF DREAMS. BLUE ANGELS SINGING THE SONGS OF METAL AND FLESH, WORDLESS AND SUBLIME.



BUT ALWAYS THE REAL WORLD WOULD INTRUDE, ALWAYS THE MUSIC OF POWER WOULD SLIP BY ME AGAIN. IT WAS TERRIBLE. I KNEW THE SCORE WAS WITHIN ME ... I JUST HAD TO LET IT OUT.

allegro e lacrimante



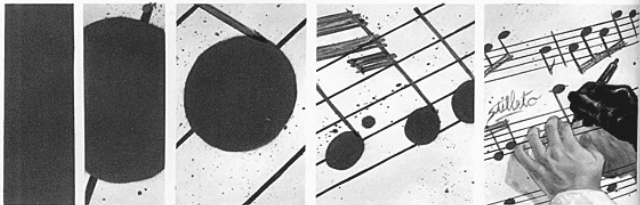
THEN ONE DAY I UNDERSTOOD.

I HAD TO
MOVE BEYOND
COMPOSITION.
BEYOND STUDY.
TO AN ACT
OF FAITH.



TO
UNLOCK
THE
PUZZLE,
I HAD
TO
UNLOCK
MYSELF.





A DECADE OF RESEARCH AND COMPOSITION HAD SWELLED MY REPUTATION IF NOT MY BANK BALANCE. I KNEW I COULD GET IT PERFORMED, AND I KNEW WHO I WANTED TO PERFORM IT.



THE AUDIENCE WAS FULL OF THE INFORMED AND THE FASHIONABLE. PEOPLE THAT I KNEW, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WOULD APPRECIATE WHAT THEY WERE BEING OFFERED TONIGHT.

I WAS VERY EXCITED. TONIGHT THE WORLD WAS TO HAVE ITS' BLINKERS REMOVED, ITS' EAR-PLUGS TAKEN OUT. TONIGHT THE VEIL BETWEEN LIFE AND THE REAL WAS TO BE SHREDDED.



THE PIECE HADN'T BEEN REHEARSED. I'D HAD THEM PREPARE WITH WHAT I CALLED RELATED PIECES. I'D FED THE MEDIA SOME CONCEPTUALIST BULLSHIT REASON FOR THAT. THEY LAPPED IT UP.



NOW IT WOULD BEGIN.



CRISP ATTACK.

MY, HE WAS
PLAYING WELL.

GOOD TONE.

THE AUDIENCE'S
ENTHUSIASM COULD
ONLY JUST BE
RESTRAINED.

THE ORCHESTRA PLAYED
LIKE MEN POSSESSED.



EVERYTHING
WAS PERFECT.

EVERYTHING
WAS PURE.



EVERYTHING
HAD PASSION.



EVERYTHING
WAS CALM.



THEN EVERY-
THING WENT
AWAY.



EVERYTHING
WENT TO HELL.

I'M ALIVE,
I THINK.

I CAN SEE.

I'M PARALYZED.
I'M BEREFT OF
TASTE, TOUCH,
AND SMELL.

I'M DEAF.

(A TOUCH OF
EXQUISITE
CRUELTY,
THAT)

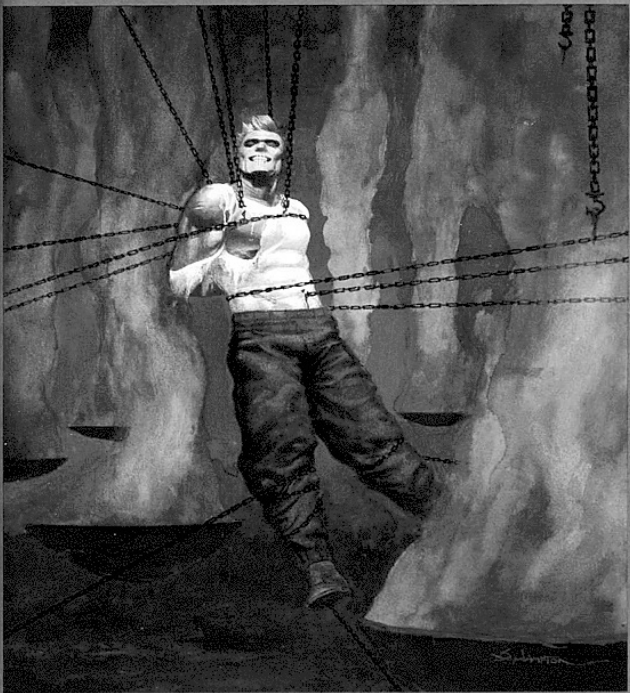
I'M HERE FOR
ETERNITY.

AND ALL I
CAN DO IS
WATCH ...



"... AS BEAUTY
COMES IN AT
THE EYE."

The End





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notes a musical genius plays on the way to madness.

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